Better Off Alone II: Hope & Faith

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Sequel to BOA A young prince is left motherless after hunters kill the Shadow Queen of an overthrown kingdom. Now, along with a reluctant bodyguard, he must live in solitude to escape the same fate. But he soon meets the daughter of another Queen...

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Prologue

Authoress' Notes : *Well, here we are; the sequel to the much acclaimed hit! Believe it or not, this story's been in production since around Chapter 8 or 9 of the original. That's about 1 ½ years in the making, people. That right there should tell you this gonna be epic... or at least I hope so. :)*

OMG Disclaimer: ***I don't own any of The Evil People From Nintendo's characters or titles that appear in this fan fiction. I only claim possession of several OCs, the plot, and story overall. Their games get them nearly $150 from me annually, so what more could they possibly want?! D:***

Better Off Alone II: Hope & Faith

Prologue

...Was it safe?

He peeked around the snowy scene, unable to answer his own question. It'd been hours since he heard that loud explosion in the distance, not to mention his mother had still not come back for him. She told him to stay there until she did, so he wasn't going anywhere soon.

...But the sun was beginning to go down, taking the temperature with it. Susceptible to the cold, his mother always made sure he was back in the den, wrapped in her nice, warm cloak when the sun touched the very top of Lunar Peak. Looking in the distance, he was shocked to see only the sun's rays remained of it now, the rest hidden by the tremendous mountain they called home.

She should've been back by now... The Chomps were gone, and nothing was out at the moment, so he cautiously emerged from the snow. He grimaced at the damp green-and-white striped hat upon his head. He took it off to wring it out, revealing his short, neat lime green hair.

Hesitantly, he snuck around the snow-covered mountain, looking for his mother. They often got separated, but they were one with nature; they always found each other somehow. When she was around, all others on the mountain obeyed her. The snow itself even seemed to heed her commands on how to snow, when to snow, or even if to snow. Her son was confident he'd find her. As long as he was on the mountain, she was always there.

"Just because you can't always see me, doesn't mean I'm not there."

She used to say that a lot and it was true. She was always there, and always would be... And when she said she'd come back for him, he knew she would. She'd never lie... Would she...?

He wanted to call out for her, but she'd warned him to never do that. Yelling would disturb the natural order of the peak, and that was one thing neither of them wanted. If he wanted to find her, all he had to do was look--

"Aah!"

He yelped, startled by a large, dominant shape suddenly towering over him. It came out of nowhere; it must've been them! He cowered, burying himself in the snow and backing away from this great oddity. The strange figure only added to his fear by stepping closer, possibly to get a better look at this poor, unfortunate misfit.

"Stop your sniveling," came its words. Something about its deep, commanding voice made him stand up straight. "You are a prince, and it's time for you to act as such."

Well, of course he was a prince; Prince Midori of the Senka Kingdom, which had been destroyed about a thousand years ago. He, his mother, and father had fled to hide out in the mountains until they found a more permanent home to suit them. Unfortunately, the

"wrongdoers", as his mother called them, had killed his father with their explosive sticks. Now, thanks to them, even she'd gone missing. He wondered how this figure knew that...

"Despite your whining, I regret to inform you will never find your mother."

...What did it mean by that? His mother was only missing, not gone. All he had to do was find her... He had so many questions on his lips... There were so many things he wanted to know. Was this... thing a friend or foe? Was it responsible for his mother's disappearance? And if so, what did it want with him?

"Come," said the figure, his words sounding more like a demand rather than a request. "We must find you some shelter."

Midori sat behind, watching in confusion. The figure went on into the snowy atmosphere, only turning to look at him once before going on. It obviously didn't care whether he followed or not. Figuring it was better than nothing, he quickly scrambled after it. He struggled to keep up, bounding thorough the deep snow, but the figure's huge strides proved too fast, leaving him to fall in a deep hole. The figure sighed at his incompetence and went back to retrieve him. He dipped a lion-like paw into the snow, and pulled him out by the tail, dropping him into nearby loose snow.

"...Quit fooling around, and let's go," he demanded again.

The prince made sure to keep up, not wanting to get this guy any angrier than he already sounded. Maybe some conversation would make him feel better...

"Who are you?" he gently asked, huddling together behind the figure.

The figure ignored him, instead leading him to a small, hollow opening made from fallen trees. It looked like a small shelter just big enough for the prince to squeeze into. He stood by and watched as Midori approached, then backed up. That wasn't where he and his mother stayed... They lived up in a secret cave high on the mountain. This one was much too close to civilization and not nearly

as secretive. Annoyed at his meekness, the figure pushed him.

"Sit here," he commanded.

Midori obeyed, plopping himself at the foot of the den. He winced a little at the cold feeling it sent up his spine. Confused, he looked up at figure again, who only glared at him with scary, red eyes. Intimidated, he turned his attention back to the ground, only to have him sit before him, huffing as if irritated.

He then lowered his head and took to going to sleep, much to Midori's surprise. Despite the figure's cold nature, Midori knew his mother had taught him better. It was always good manners to know, thank, and ask others nicely, and he'd done none of the above.

He gently touched the figure. "...Um... T-thank you for your hospitality, sir. I'm sure Mother will reward you when I tell her."

"..."

The prince coughed awkwardly. "...Uh, who are you?"

Again, the figure didn't answer, instead, shifting so his head couldn't be seen.

Still not hearing a response, Midori cowered. "Y-you're not going to hurt me, are you?"

"..."

He bit his lip, more nervous than ever. "...C-can I at least know your name?"

"Llewellyn," he muttered. "That's all you'll need to know for now."

Authoress' Notes : *Well, there you go. I want the plot to remain as vague as possible, so don't bother asking any questions until I get back from my* ***"SSBB"*** *vacation.*

1: Changes

Authoress' Notes : *Wow, sorry for the long wait, but I've been taking a bit of a break. Er, it went on a little longer than I wanted it to, but whatever. I feel I've grown and learned a lot during that time, so hopefully, it'll show in this story. Anyway, here's the first chapter for everyone. And remember: it takes place 4 years after the Prologue, so do yourself a favor and try not to get confused; this story's not as philosophical as the last one. :)*

Better Off Alone II: Hope and Faith

Chapter 1: *Changes*

Change is a... funny word. It can mean so much if used correctly, but is often tattered by those who fail to comprehend its profound meaning. To change can mean to grow, to evolve, to become something different entirely. It can mean to turn away from the ordinary and create something brand new simply by daring to be different; to create bold, new possibilities for those not strong enough to fail several times before succeeding. It can even goes as far as stand for alter one's moral, just ways into dark, horrid aspirations for a bleak future. Change means something new every time it's used, and with such poor perception of it, if difficult to know its source's true intentions.

...But that was a long time ago. That was back when the world was corrupted by evil, and darkness lurked around corner. That was back before he himself had changed. That... was history.

How long had it been? Exactly? Since things changed?

...20 years. When his mother was so painfully taken away from him.

No, that was when the change began; when he first realized how, in contrast to its joyful unpredictability, cold and cruel it could be. He was looking towards the good change; the one he reluctantly started to accept. The change where he discovered he had friends, courage, reliability, and... love.

...That was around 10 years ago, give or take a few months.

Yes. That was the change he was looking for, though, it was more suited as an aftermath of the first change. Perhaps it was an epilogue? No, things weren't over yet. They were far from it. The change was just beginning, and a new chapter was added every day. He was right in the middle of all this change, most of it centering around him and all the people he knew and loved. Change had done all it could've with the past and present, while the future was full of bold, new possibilities.

"Sir? Sir? ...Sir!"

Koops snapped out of his stupor, loudly clearing his throat and twiddling his thumbs as if nothing ever happened. "Karen, I see you've returned with the paperwork?"

His Koopa secretary narrowed her eyes through the fancy, hot pink rimmed glasses of hers. He hated those damn glasses. They were just so... annoying... or maybe it was the person whose snout they rode upon who was annoying. Both theories pretty much included each other, so the point was very moot. She was always so serious about everything, and if she wasn't serious, she sure was sarcastic enough. Her brunette ponytail dangled strictly behind the stupid glasses, only waving about slightly when she moved her head. Such a hairstyle usually showed a free spirit and playfulness, but her attitude must've killed it, or something...

She always wore the same annoying attire of her dark blue dress suit, with the black skirt that was way too high for someone at the workplace. Her eyes were a piercing pine green and sharper than her wit, which was nothing to sneeze at. Her heels were always three inches or longer, as she if was just trying to get on Koops' nerve with the thought-shattering clacking they made when she walked. Her entire persona was nothing short of strictly business,

and Koops wouldn't have been surprised if she was trying to sway him into being like that as well.

"--and we need to get this work done, sir," she scoffed, flopping a wad of papers onto his desk. Koops hadn't heard a word she'd said. "The one week we have a lot of orders to fill, you begin spacing out."

He rubbed his head sheepishly, hand going though the messy tuft of dark brown hair age had given him. "Sorry. I guess you can say I've been feeling a little... nostalgic lately." That wasn't exactly the word he was going for, but it worked for the time being.

"Well, try to do that once you get home. The one thing this town doesn't need is a lazy mayor, sir. Please try to stay on task." And with that, she sashayed her way out, off to finish her rounds for the day.

Koops frowned. Karen was a great secretary and a diligent worker, but sometimes, he couldn't help but think she may've been a little too diligent. Perhaps it was in her nature, or maybe it was just her attitude, but it was all in good measure. It wasn't like they weren't on good terms; just... just not today.

Despite this, she was right about thing; the bustling town of Petalburg had no time for a lazy mayor. With a sigh, he ruffled and filed the papers. He did this absentmindedly for a few moments until his mind began to wonder again. He had no idea why his head was so up in the clouds lately. Nothing was out of the ordinary; nothing had happened lately that would cause this. Maybe because it all seemed too good to be true. To finally have all that he wanted in life and more was nothing short of a miracle.

...Or could it've been something more? Koops was reluctant not to trust his sixth senses nowadays, which was funny, since, 10 years ago, he would've waved it off as simple superstition. Of course, that was then and, according the reflection of the wiser, more mature Koopa glancing at him from a mirror across the room, this was now.

Many villagers said he looked like a more respectable and enlightened Kevin. Koops always felt they just said that because his relation to him was the highlight of the town. It was their claim to

fame and most likely why Petalburg's population had grown so much.

What was once a small, weakling of a Koopa had grown into a prime example of a great, strong leader. Despite his passive attitude, his appearance often made newcomers and travelers assume he was a natural-born warrior who thrived on going on perilous adventures filled with danger at every turn. His bad eye and scar only fueled those tall tales even further.

He'd long removed the bandage from the scar on his nose, displaying it proudly as a badge of courage and survival. Everyone had to grow up sometime, and he was way past due. Instead of mocking and scorning at his scar, many people seemed to admire it, especially after they learned where he got it from. What was once a dark reminder of the past was now an inspiring of spark hope for the future. The only thing he wished now was that visitors would stop asking how many monsters did he have to slay to become so good.

Then again, it wasn't like he was wearing his usual blue hoodie anymore; he'd grown out of it a long time ago. It now spent its days in the closet, simply resting on a hanger, always ready to provide a form of remembrance in his endeavors of the past. Whether it was coincidental or not, Koops found himself often wearing the Stalwart Koopa's trademark black vest and red handkerchief over a plain, white tee. He saw it as more of an ode to the guy at first, but it didn't take long before he subconsciously adopted the outfit as his own.

To say he hadn't changed would've been nothing but a bold faced lie.

As he reclined in his chair, tossing another one of the oh-so-important mayor papers into the "Out" box to the right edge of his desk, he spotted the one thing that never failed to make him smile during his long, humdrum days at work; a somewhat silly group picture taken with all of his closest friends.

They'd all changed, as well.

Had it really been that long? It... it sure didn't seem like it...

He sighed fondly as he noted the contents of the picture. Instead of everyone looking poised and proper for the shoot, they were all in a heap of themselves, a result of Waffles' tomfoolery knocking them over. Kroop, who was taking the picture, snapped it before they could stop laughing at the mess, and the portrait was history. Koops actually liked this way better.

Goombella had long graduated U Goom as a valedictorian, going on to further her studies with not only Professor Frankly, but other well-renowned archeologists. She traveled abroad dozens of times in her career, earning herself a pretentious title of respect amongst her peers. Not one person in all of Rogueport failed to recognize her brilliance, especially since her real first expedition was with the world-famous Mario. Of course, like him, she was well into adulthood, even going as far as having two children with her distant, if not lackadaisical, lover, Goom Goom.

He then smiled as she remembered how her feistiness had stood the test of time. Goombella was still just much of a firecracker as she was when they first met, if not more.

Next to her in the picture was Waffles, apparently trying to do some sort of somersault midair kickflip. His pose in the portrait was funny enough itself, but the real laughter came after the picture was shot. He remembered Waffles crashed headfirst into Goombella, who caused a chain reaction of the group falling over in a disjointed heap.

The young Yoshi himself wasn't so little anymore, though. Although still not fully grown, he certainly no longer was a baby. Despite his ambitions upon first entering the Glitz Pit, Waffles had somehow ended up the leader in a gang of ragtag Yoshies, all saved from being served to hungry customers as he'd once been. Mr. Hoggle, the proprietor of the hot dog stand, just couldn't seem to understand why nearly every other egg he got somehow ended up on the roof. Since Waffles visited regularly, he was always sent to fetch the egg, it would take a liking to him, and Mr. Hoggle was out another 500 coins or so. It wasn't long before he hung it up and decided to take the Southern Fried Egg Dog of Tastiness off the menu to avoid bankruptcy.

On top of that, every single saved egg would hatch into another Yoshi, just as Waffles himself had alongside Mario. Fortunately for the adolescent Yoshi, each one of the younger ones was perfectly capable of taking care of themselves. The whole ordeal was a little awkward at first, but it wasn't long before Waffles has his own little team of feisty, little warriors reminiscent of himself over a decade ago. He told them on several occasions that The Great Gonzales Jr. worked alone, but six against one didn't exactly help get the point across.

Speaking of people who wanted to be famous, Flurrie suddenly popped into Koops' mind, going above and beyond the call. After several years of traveling abroad, she and Zip T. decided to go into the movie business and advocate her talent there. She was currently n the other side of world, probably busy with interviews, accepting awards, and giving out autographs; all the stuff movie stars did... Not like he would know anything about it. The continent of Rogueport was considered the boondocks of the Mushroom Kingdom, so it was very rare that one of her movies made it overseas. But at least she was happy doing what she did best, and in showbiz, no doubt.

Another member who'd left for places unknown was Bobbery, who was still out sailing the world as a footloose buccaneer... or at least that's what he wrote in one of the many letters he occasionally sent. He hadn't been seen by anyone in Rogueport in years, only stopping by small islands to refuel and rest. He scoured the oceans with a loyal crew, sometimes pairing up with other sailors to look for treasure and adventure. Through this, and his occasional voyages with Cortez and his haunted cronies, he'd certainly made a name for himself, if not becoming a legend. There was even an old saying going around that Bobbery was such a great seafarer, he knew whenever someone with evil intention set sail and would blast their vessel if he ever ran into them. Koops respected his wishes as much as the next guy, but it still would've been nice to hear him spin some tales about his adventures on the high seas. Letters could only say so much.

A little conflicted now, Koops frowned at the remembrance of their most eccentric member. The others had long known about who she really turned out to be and what happened to her, but he couldn't

help but grieve a little. But such a thing wasn't needed; Ms. Mowz, er, Teresa was in a much better place.

Still, it hadn't been quite the same without her popping in and gracing those around her with such... deviance.

Thinking about the mouse quickly made Koops realize that she may've been the oddest member in personality, but not in looks. A soft, warm, loving feeling embraced him as that particular person came to mind. Almost on cue, a warm summer breeze blew through a window he didn't remember opening. Karen must've done it behind his back just to cheese him off. Nonetheless, he felt it was a message from her. She was in tune with nature and spiritual things more than he once realized. She didn't used to be so... whimsical in her ways.

Vivian had probably changed the most out of everyone. She'd grown more... mysterious and hard to read. Her ambiguous nature failed to bewilder Koops, as he admired and relished in it. She may've changed a lot on the outside, but she was still as soft and sweet as always. It was easy to be deterred from her exotic looks by the soothing composure it provided. Gentle and passionate, calm, yet unsure, Koops was more than proud to say she was affianced to him. He didn't like to use the word "marriage", as it sounded too binding. Like it seemed like a good idea at the time, but had turned into something cold and distant. Maybe it was the remnant of his still-present boyhood poking through, but he didn't see Vivian as a spouse, a wife, or a lover. She was all of that and so much more, but before any of it, Vivian was and always would be his friend. The name for their relationship was an arcane one at that, but it was enduring as ever. Wasn't that all that really matter? All he knew was that he loved her and she loved him back; it shouldn't need explaining.

He sighed as he buried his face in his hands. Oh, now he'd done it. Once he started daydreaming about Vivian, any hope of finishing today's work was shot. According to the evil clock that bound him to his work, it wouldn't be over for another four hours. ...Great.

He mischievously cut his eyes the door, snorting at the distant clicking of Karen's heels down the hallway. He heard her ridiculously

long, manicured nails typing incessantly on her keyboard, mounds of paper being printed as a result. A phone rang and her annoying automated-like voice blazed though their question before she hung up. How nitpicky and perfect she was. Everything had to be done flawlessly and scheduled in her eyes, unlike him, who saw beauty in the unusual and spontaneous. She was probably only so proficient because she didn't have a spouse of her own yet. Love made people do crazy things; something Koops knew first-hand. Anyone who hadn't experienced its feeling truly wasn't a whole of whatever they claimed themselves to be. Maybe her persnickety nature was what kept all possible bachelors nice and far away...

Sneering at himself for thinking so badly of her, Koops grudgingly signed another paper and tossed it in the nearly empty "Out" box. He glared the clock on the wall over the door again, swearing it actually ticked a few minutes backward. Would it hurt to have a digital clock in there somewhere, or something? The clock even had the nerve not to have any numbers, just little lines indicating them. Irritated, he flicked the executive toy near the "In" box, not at all amused by its simplistic charm.

Again, he sighed and was about to get back to work before Karen decided to come back to chew his head off when the phone rang. Not in the mood to talk, he poised a finger over the "Hold Call" button and frowned. Oh, who was he kidding? He was still the mayor of Petalburg, and he had a duty to uphold. Even if he didn't feel like talking business with a new resident planning on moving in, or arranging a meeting with a mayor from another town, it wasn't like he could shirk it...

Hating it when his better judgment won, he answered it. "Hello, Mayor Koops' office, Koops speaking."

"Hi, Daddy!" giggled the caller.

His official face softened as he heard the sweet, young voice chime over the phone. If Karen even wanted a speck of work done now, she could just forget about it. A warm smile spread across his face as it continued.

"Whatcha doin'?"

"...Hi, sweetie. I was just thinking about you."

Authoress' Notes : *Guess this was more of an explaining chapter than anything, huh? You really weren't expecting something to actually happen this early, were you?*

2: Different

Authoress Notes : *Hooray, there's very little to be explained in this chapter! Not only that, but the plot even begins to thicken. It may seem early, but you'll see why later.*

Better Off Alone II: Hope & Faith

Chapter 2: *Different*

Koops made his way out of the office, as he'd never been happier for it to be five o'clock. He managed to get a nice amount of work done, in spite of his constant daydreaming. Karen sure didn't think so, as she advised him to take along the few papers he didn't finish, as well as some documents that'd be waiting for him tomorrow. She may've been on his back at work, but he wasn't about to let her work him around the clock.

"Karen..." He kneaded his brow. "It's late; the end of the day. I got enough things done. Can't it wait until tomorrow?"

"Perhaps." She adjusted those stupid glasses. "But how do I know you won't come in with your head in the clouds again? And how do I know this won't continue for an undetermined amount of time?"

"It won't, but come on... I try to keep work and home separate for a reason. Gimme a break."

"Breaks are for slackers. You're not a slacker, are you?"

He turned his nose up. "No..."

She made her way out, gesturing to the stack of papers still on his desk. "Then, I expect all those unfinished files to be ready by tomorrow. The town is counting on those things getting done, you

know."

Of course he *knew* . He'd been doing this for over 15 years; he *knew* more than anybody! But Petalburg wasn't going to fall into ruin if he did them tomorrow. There was not a deadline in sight, and she sure as spit *knew* that.

He watched her casually sashay her way back to her desk, incessantly typing at her keyboard once more. The phone rang and she picked it up, soon in a conversation with a pair of Yoshies who lived down the street. Being new residents and not used to living in a town, they called nearly every day to ask how to turn on or shut off something.

Using this to his advantage, he carefully turned off all the lights in his working quarters, closed and locked the door so she wouldn't go snooping through his stuff, and inched down the hall, passing her desk as she began a longwinded explanation on how stoves worked. From the frustrated snorts and grunts from the other side of the phone, the Yoshi didn't understand, forcing her to turn and face the computer and look up simpler instructions. With her being so preoccupied, he quickly made his way out the door.

Now outside, Koops was able to exhale and head for home, not a care in the world. The sun was setting, kids were being called inside by their mothers, and the town was winding down for the day. A few residents greeted him with the casual "Hello" and "How was your day?" on their way either home or to the store before it closed. Some closer friends stopped to chat a little before he bid them a fond farewell and continued on his way. What a wonderful, happy town he ran.

On his way, he passed the one house he'd spent nearly half his life in. It seemed so weird to pass it like a causal abode. It was his home and always would be, but it was a home away from home. It was where he was born to a caring mother and father, where he learned how it felt to have a family, and where he fought some of the hardest mental struggles after it was torn apart by Hooktail. It was where his now-aged dad lived, more headstrong than someone his age should

be. He still kept an eye on him to make sure he didn't go off and get eaten by anymore dragons. Done reminiscing, he kept on.

It wasn't long before he reached his own home, the one where he mirrored his parents and had his own family. It was a simple, normal house, where a simple, normal family should live. Oh, but what dwelled within its cozy, welcoming walls was anything but. With this in mind, he smiled and unlocked the door, stepping inside.

For some reason, the front room was dimmed to the point one couldn't normally see. Although not as clear as another certain person in the house, Koops could see well enough to tell where he could easily walk and find the light switch without tripping over something. That would be the normal thing to do, but he wasn't going to turn them on. No, not yet. He simply made the gesture of going over to the switch when a soft voice cooed from the darkness.

"Hello," it simply said. Koops could practically feel a grin attached to it.

"Hello," he spoke with a smile, not even looking in its direction.

"...You didn't even know I was over here, did you?"

"Of course I did. I was trying to humor you by pretending I didn't."

"I see."

The source of the voice then rose from its position on the couch, the lights almost coming on automatically. Koops winced a little, having to get used to the sudden brightness of the room. He turned his gaze to the switch, seeing Vivian hovering beside it.

"And here I thought you were ignoring me," came her suave, almost alluring voice once again. It sure had changed. Her tone was much more mature, in contrast to the light, jittery voice she once used to have. It had to be one of the last voices he thought she'd ever end up with.

"Now, why would I do that? You know me better."

"I would hope so." She gingerly smoothed out the cherry red dress

she wore, running fingers through long satin-like hair.

Despite her concealed state, Koops still sensed her. The two had gotten to the point where they didn't need to see each other to know they were there. Koops didn't know if it was a marital bond, or a magical one, but it sure was nice to have.

The siren seemed calmer and more sedated than her once-frantic self over a decade ago. Koops figured it was probably the true nature of her species setting in. Although still young and fresh on their terms, she'd more than matured enough to be quite the coaxer. She could tell the biggest lie in the world, but the smoothness of her voice and oddly calm demeanor made it hard not to believe.

Her hair was once a soft cotton candy pink, but it'd now matured into a riveting magenta and was as loose and free as the fire her fingers commanded. She still wore Flurrie's necklace, but it wasn't even considered to belong to the Cloud Spirit anymore; the jewelry was officially Vivian's now. Her striped hat still rested firmly upon her head, covering those sparkling, ruby eyes of hers.

"Nice to have you back home." He greeted him with soft kiss and a hug. "And early, no less. You didn't skip out on Karen again, did you?"

"No, but it sure is tempting." He went over to the couch, the seats welcomingly warm from where Vivian once. "She didn't think I got enough done at work, so she tried sending it all with me."

"Well... Where is it?"

He smirked mischievously. "Left it at work."

She made a face. "But Koops, it's your responsibility. You shouldn't take your duties so lightly, you know. It could get you into big trouble later on."

"It won't, I promise. I just... I don't want Karen's workaholic syndrome to rub off on me. You know how busy I am, but it's not gonna interfere with you."

Vivian did know, not to mention how understanding she was when it

came to his duties. If he was confident he could get it done in a timely manner without any trouble, she refused to pester him about it. He wouldn't have been mayor for nearly 15 years if he wasn't an able one.

"Okay, then. I trust you. Just wanted to make sure you weren't... letting things go to your head again."

Koops blinked. What did she mean by that? He turned and asked her the same question.

She shuffled nervously, not meaning to let it come out like that. "I guess what I mean to say is... Koops, is there something bothering you? You've been a little out of it lately. Maybe it's work, or Karen, or something else, but I feel like there's something wrong and you're not telling me."

Oh, great. Even she was beginning to notice. And when Vivian caught on, he wouldn't hear the end of it until she got it out of him.

"There's nothing wrong. It's just a hunch."

"...A hunch of what? Something good? Something bad?"

He shook his head, unsure. "Something... I don't know."

She began playing with her hands, something he knew all too well as a sign of insecurity. "...Would it help if I had said hunch as well?"

"What?"

"I thought maybe it was just me, but... I don't know."

At this point, Koops was beginning to think they were both just being overly cautious. Nothing had been going on lately; nothing weird, nothing out of the ordinary... So, what could possibly be up?

"Maybe we should ignore it," finally said Vivian. "The only reason you're probably sensing it is because I am."

That may've been true. Being of a species that solely relied on magic and the supernatural, she had a habit of sensing things up to

several weeks before they happened. The last case of this was when a swindling gang of Koopas from Rogueport came to town, looking for trouble. Vivian foresaw it days before it happened and, with a little help from a few willing neighbors, Koops drove them off before they did any real damage. Staying with her so long made some of her magic to rub off on him, causing him to sometimes sense things as often as she did, as well as having a heighted sense of seeing in the dark.

He scratched his head. "Well, I guess you could say—"

"Daddy!"

"Daddy?"

Koops perked up, Vivian turning to source of the voices.

"Oh, well, there go the girls." She smiled, gently touching his hand. "I think we'll have to continue this later."

"Uh..."

"Daddy!" A young Koopa girl ran over, taking refuge behind him on the couch. "She hit me! Tell her to stop! It hurts..."

"Nu-unh! You hit yourself!" protested her sibling.

"Okay, now stop that. You both know there's no horseplaying in the house." He grabbed the girl from behind him and held her close, making sure the other girl couldn't reach her.

"But we were playing outside, and then she ran in here because I was winning!"

The other flinched. "No, I ran in because you hit me with a stick!"

"But you were the bad guy! I was supposed to!"

"All right, all right, you two. Knock it off." He laughed, making sure to keep them apart. "Playtime's over, and so's all this roughhousing, okay?"

One nodded. "Okay."

The other pouted. "Okay..."

He put the older of the two down, eyeing the younger as she shot her a mischievous glare. Upon seeing Koops had noticed this, she quickly feigned innocence. The pair seemed to be getting on each other over something, whether it was the last cookie in the kitchen, or who got the bigger half when Vivian broke it apart for them. Of course, being twins, it was only natural they'd squabble every now and again.

Hope, the one he'd just put down, was the older twin, a perfect mix of both her parents. Koops had good reason to believe the mixture of their species made her a Dark Koopa, her shell's harder density and smooth purple color being key elements. She also had her late grandmother's soft, motherly face, but couldn't help but smile and chuckle like Koops. Her eyes were a bright ruby like Vivian's, as well as boasting her once-pink curly hair. A long, shadowy prehensile tail dangled behind her, not only giving her sort of a third hand, but the ability to descend into the shadows like Vivian.

Her attire consisted of a simple red shirt with a Starman on it, along with a pair of jean shorts and soft purple shoes to match her assumed species. As it was customary to their species, Vivian fashioned a red-and-white striped hat out of the finest silk she could find to match her own. Like her father, she was gentle and passive in nature, much like her welcoming surroundings. A warm, likeable person, the entire town couldn't help but love her irresistible charm. To them, she was like a second Koops.

To her side, stood the ever-mischievous Faith. She was the younger one, but only by five minutes and 19 seconds, something she refused to let anyone forget. In contrast to her more mature sibling, she was brash, outgoing, and a bit snappy, unlike anyone else in the immediate family. She was also guilty of being a tomboy, despite her young age. Koops could compare her attitude to a younger Waffles'. Although, the Yoshi seemed to have a little more self-control than she did at times...

Koops admitted he was baffled as to where she got her boldness

from. Living in Petalburg made even the fiercest warrior mellow as long as they stayed there. Vivian once shyly suggested she got it from her Aunt Lillian, saying it was almost scary how much the two were alike. That sat well and good with the father, but... He had to frown a little as she made her way over to Vivian in the kitchen, complaining about her playmate's passivity. Aside from her spunky attitude and lively nature, there was something else quite different about Faith; something that perked quite the interest.

She looked nothing like her father.

In every single way, shape, and form, she was practically the mirror image of her mother. She boasted soft, light blue curls that reminded Koops of winter when he saw her. This made sense though, as she had the element of ice, a gift passed down from her mother's magical heritage. Hope was the same way, being able breathe small puffs of fire. Both were too young to use them properly, but Vivian stated they'd learn in time. Small, lime lips curved into a pout as her mother refused to let her have her naughty way. Gloved hands reached up to protest more, but Vivian gently pushed them away, Hope busy helping her set the table.

Faith's eyes were concealed like Vivian's, but Koops knew for a fact they were a deep, mesmerizing sapphire you could get lost in forever if looked at hard enough. She didn't like wearing clothes, standing out in comparison to the rest of her family. ...Well, that and the fact she gained no traits from him at all.

Koops was a Koopa and Vivian was a Shadow Siren; such a fact had been established time and time again by everyone who saw them together. ...But if that was true, what would their offspring look like? Koops never took the question seriously in all their time together. He was too busy growing up, accepting his responsibilities, and providing for himself and Vivian to notice.

Time seemed to fly by after he became mayor. It wasn't long before he was old enough to be on his own, and he and Vivian were able to move into a vacant home, one of many new houses built in his time of being head of Petalburg. He soon proposed to her, and marriage quickly followed. For the next year or so, the two developed a bit of a bad habit of distancing themselves from others. It was only natural

they'd want some time alone, dealing with personal, spousal matters. It was their time to bond, to share things physically, mentally, and... well, in other certain ways he cared not to talk about.

Of course, one thing led to another, and it wasn't long before found out he was to be a father. The girls were born not long after noon on a particularly warm day right in the middle of spring, when the surrounding nature of Petalburg was at its finest. They couldn't have arrived on a more beautiful day if he planned it. He remembered Vivian stating they got their names from the hope he gave her and the faith she had in him, as well as something from the one of last few things Ms. Mowz said all those years ago...

It struck him as odd their younger daughter lacked his genes, while the older appeared to've gotten some from both parents. Then again, what did he care? Koops was proud to've had children with Vivian, especially when one looked as beautiful as she did. He couldn't have asked for more.

...But as much as he and Vivian loved her, the fact still remained she was different. She would always stand out in the crowd, she'd never find another like herself, and she would have to live with inevitable ridicule because of that. It was like a curse and a blessing in one. She was unaware of this at her young age, but soon, the time would come where someone would have to tell her...

"But, Mom...!" Faith whined, began pulling on Vivian's dress.

"No buts. You know you can't do that in the house. You'll break something." She gently urged her and Hope towards the staircase. "Now, it's time for dinner, so go wash up."

Once the two made their way upstairs, Vivian sighed and joined Koops on the couch. He smiled.

"Were they a handful today?"

"Oh, no. Better than usual, actually. They're just a little hyper from playing around outside. They'll calm down once their stomachs're full." She then turned to him, taking a hand and listening intently. "Now, tell me... What exactly's on your mind?"

Narrowing his eyes, a gruff Koopa spit into the grass. "'ou're a load 'a bunk, d'you know that, Ralph?"

A Doogan drew back. "What did I do?!"

"Nothin', and that's exactly my point. Ya don't do nothin', an' we don't get nothin' in return. That's 'ow huntin' goes, Ralph; 'ou gots ta work if 'ou gonna git some respect. An' 'ou, my sir, ain't workin'."

"Not working? You're one to talk! We been searching up and down this crummy island for years, and we haven't come up with one speck of a killing. Who's the so-called, 'Hunter Master' here, the guy responsible for making all direct lineages to the Winged Yoshi extinct?"

"'hat was a long time ago, an' 'ou know it. Time is against us, Ralph; we ain't as young as we used ta be. Makin' a good killin's more complicated 'han it seems, apparently." He narrowed his eyes as he turned away. "An' we still 'aven't found the prince, nor the king, it seems. 'Tis troublesome..."

A Bandit's cloth jingled with their earnings as he shuffled over. "Kaizer... I think I may've found... an ideal area to search for our quarry..."

"Oy, Jasper... 'his ain't another wild goose chase, is it?"

"Oh, no, no, no." His smirk spread into a devious grin. "I hear tell the mayor in a nearby town is someone I think you may know. A guy by the name of... Koops?"

Kaizer's eyes widened. "'ou mean, Oops? Good Ol' Oops is the mayor here? Well, ain't 'hat just a hoot an' a half! Kid always said it's 'hat he wanted ta do, but I always 'hought he'd chicken out by the time he got old enough."

Jasper raised an eyebrow. "I think you misheard me. I said his name was—"

"Oh, I 'eard ya, ya ol' bloke. 'Oops' is what I used ta call 'em when

he was jus' a wee li'l youngin'. Always bumpin' inta stuff, an' not lookin' where he's goin'. So, what's he got ta do with 'his?"

He simply smiled. "Well, I thought, since we were in the neighborhood, we'd drop by your old hometown for some fond memories. You and Koops should get along pretty well, right?"

He laughed. "When 'ou say 'pretty well', and 'ou mean 'not at all', then yeah." He then turned to scowl at Ralph. "Now, we wanna look nice an' good for my ol' pal, right? Do me a favor an' try not to mess this'un up, will ya?"

Ralph crossed his arms, looking away. "Yes, sir. Will do."

"Sayin' an' doin' are two diff'rnt things, Ralphie. Try an' reinstate my ever-thinnin' patience wit' 'ou tomorrow." He looked up to the setting sun. "It's gettin' late, so we'll crash 'ere tonight, but we're leavin' as soon dawn breaks, got it?"

Jasper nodded. "Sounds like a plan to me. We need to stock up on more supplies, anyway."

Ralph grumbled. "...Yeah, sure, whatever you say, Your Highness."

The Koopa thumped him over the head with the gun, making it accidentally go off and blow apart some nearby barrels. "See that? That right there was 'our fault."

"What? But you set it off!"

"Yes, but I wouldn't 'ave if you'd been bothered to've locked it properly." He shoved the rifle into him. "Don't let it 'appen again, 'ou big ol' oaf. Now, c'mon on an' let's get some sleep... Or t least try, lest 'ou blow our heads off in our sleep."

With that, he and Jasper both chuckled and entered the nearby Rogueport Inn. Ralph frowned at the gun in his hands, locking it as earlier instructed. Sometimes he wondered if he was really cut out for this type of work. Despite being skilled at handling guns and ammo, he had a feeling it wasn't being quite recognized, or, if it was, it was for all the wrong reasons.

"Ralphie, don't just stand out there like a dope! Git in 'ere already! Do I 'ave ta tell ya ev'rythin'?!"

Groaning, he put his gun away and joined his fellow teammates for what he hoped would be a good night's sleep.

Supper was over and, at that point, it was time for the youngest occupants to go to bed. Hope humbly obeyed this rule, but Faith just had to protest a little, not sure why the grown-ups got to stay up so much later than they did. Vivian simply told her, as she did nearly every night, it was for her best interest. Her younger daughter had no idea what that meant, but finally gave in after few more irritable minutes.

"This is so unfair. It's barely even nighttime, and Mom and Daddy get, like, a million-bazillion more hours to stay up and watch TV," grumbled Faith, her face in the pillow on the bottom of the girls' bunk bed, which she only got because she was younger. That was so lame. It was only by five minutes and 19 seconds!

"There aren't even that many hours in a day," corrected Hope. "And a million-bazillion's not the right word. You either mean a million or a bazillion."

The younger sneered. She hated it when she did that. Everything always had to be absolutely perfect for her. They were five; making mistakes was what they did. But not perfect, smart, sweet, little Hope. Oh, no. Her annoying ideal ways always made Faith look like a delinquent in comparison.

"Now, knock it off and go to bed," she scolded, turning over on top. "Mom said staying up's bad for you and gives you wrinkles, makes you cranky, and spoils your appetite..."

"How does she know? You think her mom ever all said that stuff to her?" She pouted. "I bet it's not even true."

Hope was appalled she'd even think that. "Don't say that! Of course it is. You think Mom would lie?"

"But just think about it; there's a lot of stuff she won't tell us..." She frowned a bit, realizing the reason for her appearance was one of them. "She keeps saying it's for our own good or that we need to grow up a little, but... you think it's really that bad?"

The elder turned over. "I don't know. All I *do* know is that she's Mom, and she must know what she's talking about, so we hafta listen to her... And Daddy, too. Now, good night."

Faith scowled and wrestled with her sheets, flinging the pillow about in a silent fit of incompleteness. It was always like this, every single day for as long as she could remember. Her parents always loved them, raising them both with the best of care and guidance, but there were always these few, little secrets they just didn't want to seem to answer. They told them what was good and what was bad, how to do this and that, teaching them the only way a pair of loving parents could, but that wasn't enough. Aside from all they provided, they still refused to spill about the more intriguing questions she asked.

...Like why she was different. Why weren't there others who looked like her and her mom? Why didn't Hope look exactly the same, and why didn't she look a thing like her dad? Where did her mom come from, and where were her parents?

They knew all about the how they met while going on a great adventure with the famous Mario, the friends they met, the enemies they made, and the illustrious Crystal Stars. The ancient legend along with the Thousand-Year Door was anything but new to the twins. Koops sitting down and telling them the tale over and over again was one of their favorite pastimes. She also knew that she and Hope were apparently descendants of one the Four Heroes. She couldn't remember his name, but when Koops showed them a picture, their resulting awe was good enough to keep that interesting tidbit in the back of their minds. They could brag about their famous father up and down the town everyday if they wanted to, telling all the kids about how he was related to a famous hero, journeyed with Mario to vanquish hundreds of monsters, and saved the world. It was really cool to be able to make everyone else jealous of it.

...But then the questions would shift to her mother. Was she related

to anyone famous? What was she, and where had she come from? She journeyed with Mario as well, and that was cool, but nothing else could be said for her. She remembered one of the neighborhood kids said that their mom said her mom used to be connected with bad people, and had only become good because of Koops. That made Faith mad, because she knew it wasn't true. There was little she actually did know about her mom, but she couldn't have been a bad person; she was too nice to be!

She rubbed her head in frustration, all the recollections and missing pieces starting to give her a headache. Staying up past her bedtime might've been a factor, too, but she was too stubborn to admit it. It wasn't like it even mattered; she did it all the time. Hope, being the goody two-shoes she was, was already sound asleep, her mind free of all worry. Good for her for not caring about how secretive everyone they knew and loved was being. Faith only sighed and, hugging her mangled pillow to her chest, looked out the window at the lonely moon, an oddity amid the millions of stars. Maybe... someone, somewhere... just like her, was feeling just as forlorn. As both her and the only light in the nighttime sky.

Authoress' Notes : *Try and take a guess as to who the main character in this story's gonna be. :)*